

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE  
NASHVILLE DIVISION**

<b>MICHAEL DAVID SILLS and MARY SILLS,</b>	)	
	)	
	)	<b>Case No. 3:23-cv-00478</b>
<b>Plaintiffs,</b>	)	
	)	
<b>v.</b>	)	<b>Judge Campbell</b>
	)	<b>Magistrate Judge Frensley</b>
	)	
<b>SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION, et al.</b>	)	<b>JURY DEMAND</b>
	)	
	)	
<b>Defendants.</b>	)	

**MOTION TO DISMISS OF DEFENDANTS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE  
SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION, WILLIE MCLAURIN, AND ROLLAND SLADE**

Plaintiff Michael David Sills had a sexual relationship with Defendant Jennifer Lyell when he was a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and she was a student. Lyell claims the relationship was nonconsensual and abusive—allegations that Sills disputes. The Southern Baptist Convention held an Annual Meeting in 2021 and its Messengers voted to conduct an independent internal investigation on the Executive Committee for the Southern Baptist Convention’s handling of sexual abuse claims. In the end, the independent internal investigation determined that Lyell was truthful, and the sexual relationship between Sills and Lyell was not consensual and was abusive.

Sills and his wife Mary now seek damages claiming that Sills was defamed by the ECSBC, McLaurin, and Slade, by repeating Lyell’s accusation that Sills sexually abused her. However, because the Sills’ conspiracy theory and defamation claim would require the Court to enmesh itself in the inner workings of the Southern Baptist Convention, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibits the Sillses’ claims. Moreover, because the ECSBC has the ability to believe Lyell over Sills, there is no plausible allegation that the ECSBC, McLaurin, or Slade acted

with actual malice. Nor is there a plausible allegation that any statement defamed Sills—he alleges his reputation was ruined through the truthful statement that he engaged in an extramarital affair with Lyell.

For the foregoing reasons and others, as described more fully in the accompanying Memorandum of Law, the Executive Committee, McLaurin, and Slade request that the Court dismiss the Complaint.

Respectfully submitted,

*s/ Brigid M. Carpenter*

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## **CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I hereby certify that the foregoing Motion to Dismiss was filed electronically. Notice of this filing will be sent by operation of the Court's electronic filing system to all parties indicated on the electronic filing receipt. All other parties will be served by regular United States mail. Parties may access this filing through the Court's electronic filing system.

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***Guidepost Solutions, LLC and  
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this 12th day of July, 2023.

*s/ Brigid M. Carpenter*

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